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Senate

Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein

"Support the Specter/Harkin/Feinstein NIH Amendment"

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I wanted an opportunity as a cosponsor of the amendment to say a few words and to add my support to that of the chairman of the Appropriations Committee and the chairman and ranking member of the subcommittee.

We stand at a very unusual time. Because of the human genome and the advances in molecular biology, it is now possible to develop and target drugs to specific ailments and therefore to break frontiers, to cross barriers and make uncharted progress. What we began exactly 5 years ago under the leadership of the Senator from Pennsylvania and the Senator from Iowa was essentially to double the funding of NIH over 5 years, to be able to take advantage of the new horizon in front of us.

I serve with President and Mrs. Bush, senior, as vice chairman of the National Dialogue on Cancer. Senator Sam Brownback has just come aboard. And in the Senate Cancer Coalition which Senator Brownback and I co-chair, we have heard miraculous testimony, for example, from Dr. Brian Drucker, the inventor of the drug Gleevec which is used to treat patients with chronic myeloid leukemia. Gleevec is one of a new generation of targeted cancer drugs that just kill

bad cancer cells, leaving good cells unaffected. There is much less toxicity with this drug. Individuals do not lose their hair, they are not nauseated, and it has been shown to produce a 75-percent remission rate. That is where we are in this point in time. The sponsors of this amendment want to continue that advance.

I say to my colleagues on this side, we all voted for a host of amendments. They all cost money. This is the big one. This is the one that will really make a difference for the health of Americans. If this amount is not added to the budget, the number of new and competing non-biodefense research grants will drop, from 9,902 in fiscal year 2003 to 9,827 in fiscal year 2004.

NIH says the optimum number percent of approval for these research grants is about 40 percent. Through the increases we have made over the last 5 years, the grant approval rate is now about 30 percent. All this amendment does is allow us to keep even with that rate. Unfortunately, it takes \$1.5 billion to do that.

The suffering out there is enormous. Because of advances, we can find new cures and new

drugs with better prevention and better rehabilitation. That is what I believe the American people want to spend these dollars on.

I have faith in what the chairman of the Appropriations Committee said. Actually, I have never in the 10 years I have been here on a dollar matter heard him make a misstatement. I have no reason not to believe what he is saying. It may be true in the absolute terms that this is not an emergency and the original plans were to take this money in a different way. For some reason that changed. The need is there. And the results will be there. I am absolutely convinced of it.

Senator Brownback and I, as cochairs of the Senate Cancer Coalition, hold hearings. We hear from people. We hear from scientists. We hear from advocates. Yet more than 575 health, research, and disease advocacy organizations support this amendment. That is no coincidence. It is because people know now that because of the advances in molecular biology, because of the human genome, we are on the brink of new discoveries. We want those discoveries to continue.

This is not pie in the sky. This is

real. Every dollar spent will yield health dividends for people. I hope we will pass this amendment.

I yield the floor.